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When intellectuals fail? Brexit and hegemonic challenge

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Introduction

The result of the United Kingdom European Union membership referendum on 23rd June 2016 where the majority of voters supported Leave came as a large and very unwelcome surprise to most British university intellectuals. Writing the day after the referendum, Professor Sir Keith Burnett, Vice-Chancellor of Sheffield University, expressed the view of many academics when he reflected on the cultural chasm that he saw suddenly and disturbingly revealed. 'These last few weeks', he said, 'have left me wondering what I should think of our country. I've been shocked at the opinions that some have been voicing. I have felt at times that I am not in the place I grew up. Had I misunderstood what this land of my birth really is?' (Burnett, 2016) Across the land, universities responded energetically to what they perceived as a challenge to their core values, with advice and counselling services available for vulnerable staff (Furedi, 2016). Pervaded by a collective sense of injury, loss and palpable failure, academia sought to comprehend how such a large section of the public could be so dismissive of its values, guidance and example. Why had its understanding of the future proved to be so wrong?

The bare statistics of the referendum graphically portray the scale of the rejection and the large division over Brexit between university intellectuals and a majority of voters: 9 per cent of academics and 52 percent of UK voters supported leaving the European Union (EU) (University and College Union, 2017). In common with all the major national and international institutions of government, industry, finance and the media, universities had campaigned vigorously for remaining in the EU. Rarely can European elites have been so unified on a single issue and rarely can university intellectuals have been so uncritical of the unquestioning adherence by such elites to the *status quo*. Throughout the Brexit debate, the belief that the future of the UK lay within the EU received little challenge and much support in universities. In an exercise in hegemony where the existing structures of EU power were explained and, it was assumed, legitimised, academics played their part to the full.

In analysing the role of British university intellectuals in the politics of the Brexit experience, this paper draws initially on a Gramscian understanding of hegemony and the role of intellectuals in maintaining or challenging hegemony. This is extended in the course of the discussion through the incorporation of a more thoroughgoing view of intellectuals as both cultural agents and vehicles of elite power. The starting point is an exploration of the nature of EU hegemony and its relationship with university intellectuals, particularly those in the social sciences. What is the basis for their political and, as revealed by their response to the referendum result, emotional support for the EU project? Secondly, there is the question of the sources of the hegemonic challenge. Given the political, institutional and ideological power of the EU hegemony, how did a counter-hegemonic force emerge capable of opposing its apparently overwhelming superiority? Closely linked to this, why did 17,410,742 Leave voters choose to ignore the recommendation and traditional authority of most academics? Thirdly, why did university intellectuals so conspicuously fail to predict the scale of the counter-hegemonic challenge? To what extent has their attachment to the EU hegemony restricted their ability to understand the nature of its opposition through their use of selective and limited modes of analysis?

Intellectuals and the EU hegemony

From the Gramscian perspective, intellectuals play a central role in explaining and legitimating a hegemony. This is particularly true of 'traditional intellectuals' such as university academics who enjoy an established social position apparently independent of particular class interests, unlike 'organic intellectuals' who explicitly serve such interests. If successfully recruited by a particular hegemony, this notional independence enables traditional intellectuals to act as 'experts in legitimation' of its power (Gramsci, 9-10) tasked with 'the function of developing and sustaining the mental images, technologies and organisations which bind together the members of a class and of an historic bloc into a common identity' (Cox, 1983: 168). Hence, 'One of the most important characteristics of any group that is developing towards dominance is its struggle to assimilate and to conquer "ideologically" the traditional intellectuals' (Gramsci, 1971: 10).

The historic bloc, or *blocco storico*, meanwhile, constitutes the dominant power group in a given arena which acts to create hegemony through the integration and propagation of a set of interests thus 'bringing about not only a unison of economic and political aims, but also intellectual and moral unity....on a "universal" plane' (Gramsci, 1971: 181-2). In the case of the EU, it is perhaps better described as an international or transnational historic bloc supportive of a particular international order which has evolved as an integrated response to two imperatives: first, the global, and more particularly, American pressure for a regional neoliberal vehicle in Europe and, second, the post-war and Cold War drive for 'ever closer union' between European states (Jacobitz, 1991: 11; Bohl, 2006: 64). Both imperatives welcome the economic and political dissolution of national borders in Europe and both are compatible with the creation of a powerful central bureaucracy to enable their realisation. For the former, the goal is an integrated European economic space achieved through the elimination of national constraints on trade and competition and the transnationalisation of production (Ziltener, 2004: 962-4). The role played by United States structural financial power in the development of this neoliberal project is significant and has been analysed by a number of scholars (Baker, 2006; Cafruny and Ryner, 2007; Panitch and Gindin, 2003 and 2005; Seabrook, 2001). For the latter imperative, the goal is an integrated European political space: contested by the long-established feud between federalists and those favouring inter-governmental arrangements, impeded by the periodic (if temporary) rejection by Member States electorates of new treaties and new EU powers, but inexorably moving forward in the pursuit of political union (Bradbury, 2009; Dinan, 2005; Wallace, 1995). And for both economic and political imperatives, the cross-border centralisation of power in the form of an EU technocracy with broad discretion and autonomy is essential for the continuing and synergistic expansion of its economic and political functions. Market integration promotes political integration through its need (a) for procedures for the settlement of disputes and (b) for mechanisms for the harmonisation of regulation and taxation (Vaubel, 2009: 23-4). Political integration promotes economic integration through the instinct of all bureaucracies, particularly those with limited democratic accountability, to expand their powers through the creation of new territories of market governance. The EU institutions (Commission, Parliament, Court and Council) share a vested interest in ever-closer union because this enhances their power and prestige. The result is a transnational order of state-centric neo-liberalism, or ordoliberalism, tasked with facilitating the

operation of markets across national borders through the single market and the promotion of the 'four freedoms' of movement for goods, capital, services, and labour (Bonefeld, 2012; Sandholz and Zysman, 1989).

The construction of the EU historic block, fusing economic and political ambitions, was and is a hegemonic project conducted through negotiation between elites rather than through any substantial democratic process (Bieling and Steinhilber, 2000; Haller, 2008). 'The initial bargain was elite-led, as all subsequent partial bargains have been' with the assumption that popular consent would follow that lead (Wallace and Smith, 1995: 151). The locking in of interested organisations from business, labour and national administrative agencies was a much higher priority than the direct involvement of publics (Wallace, 1990). Thus the democratic deficit was designed in, as were the consequent problems of EU legitimacy to which it gave rise (Wallace, 1993).

That being the case, the interesting question is why British academics who, as we shall see, are predominantly on the left of the political spectrum, were prepared to give their support and legitimation to an EU project with an explicit neo-liberal agenda, achieved through established elite networks, serviced by a centralised and unaccountable technocracy, and largely disdainful of democracy except as a source of *post hoc* legitimation? How did the EU hegemony recruit the Britain's traditional intellectuals? The answer lies in the adaptive capacity of a hegemony which, Gramsci reminds us, is a measure of its sophistication and its durability. This capacity is expressed through what he terms *trasformismo*: a 'strategy of assimilating and domesticating potentially dangerous ideas by adjusting them to the policies of the dominant coalition' (Cox, 1983: 166-7). Successful hegemonies are those capable of recognising, responding to and, if necessary, accommodating the challenge from competing power groups and belief systems through negotiation and arbitration, whilst retaining their essential hegemonic character (Germain and Kenny, 1998).

In the case of the EU hegemony, that adaptation began with the launch of the Single European Market and its promotion as a vehicle for the construction of a 'social Europe' as well as the means to a more efficient and effective economic union (Ross, 1995: 43-45). Social and economic aims were presented as complementary and achievable through the responsive politics of the EU. Aably shepherded by Jacques Delors, then President of the European Commission, the internal market policy aimed to attract the trade unions and the traditional intellectuals of the Left into what was presented as a common social democratic endeavour. In so doing, it sought to address the established anti-capitalist concerns of leading British politicians such as Michael Foot, Tony Benn, Peter Shore and Barbara Castle who, as cabinet ministers, had opposed UK membership of the EU in the June 1975 referendum. Their position was reflective of those on the Left of the labour movement at the time. At a special Labour Party conference, just two months before the referendum, the party voted against membership of Europe by nearly two-to-one, a majority much assisted by the fact that 39 of the party's 46 affiliated trade unions voted against (Langdon, 2015). Benn summed up the feeling of many on the Left when he said in cabinet in March 1975: 'In practice, Britain will be governed by a European coalition government that we cannot

change, dedicated to a capitalist or market economic theology' (Benn, 1990: 346; quoted by Callinicos, 2015).

Symbolic of his approach to this antagonism on the Left is Delors' address to the UK's Trade Union Congress (TUC) in September 1988 where, in a comprehensive rebranding of the EU, he assured the audience that completion of the Single European Market in 1992 would provide 'a new model for society, a model based on a skilful balance between society and the individual...throughout Europe we encounter similar mechanisms of social solidarity, of protection of the weakest and of collective bargaining' that further European integration could defend and modernise. Identifying a common problem and common solution, he continued: 'The globalization of markets and new technologies affect our perceptions and our way of life. All those concerned with the organization of our society must adapt. This of course includes the Trade Unions of Europe.' (Pro-Europa, 2017. See also History and Policy, 2010). For the EU, the key hegemonic task was to shift the narrative away from one of conflict where those with an anti-neoliberal position calling for a stronger 'positive' social integration in Europe directly challenged the market integration mission of the EU 'to a consensual constellation, where it is seen as common sense that social issues are important so long as they improve competitiveness' (Bernhard, 2010: 175). The strength of this adaptive strategy, Bernhard argues, has meant that anti-neoliberal arguments have lost their pervasive power and the 'neoliberal hegemony has become even more thorough' (Bernhard, 2010: 175). Van Apeldoorn agrees and suggests that the incorporation of the concerns of European labour has undoubtedly occurred but has been 'done in such a way that these concerns are, in the end, subordinated to the overriding objective of neoliberal competitiveness' (van Apeldoorn: 181). What is clear is that in common with the trade unions in other countries, the TUC was in due course convinced by Delors' persuasive presentation of partnership, co-option was in train and a seminal moment in the process of hegemonic adaptation was at hand.

Adaptation has been aided by the contribution of, other academic commentators who are either sceptical of the EU's hegemonic intent, or, accept the intent but see the EU as redeemable through the good offices of social democracy. Some have gone further and seen fit to embellish the Delors vision, viewing EU integration not only as a force promoting the international good against narrow national self-interest but also as a bulwark acting against US-led neo-liberalism (Hardt and Negri, 2000. See the analysis by Cafruny, 2015; Ryner, 2012). At its most developed, this interpretation has become a celebration of a European counter-hegemonic project acting in defence of the European social model (Cafruny 2009: 64).

In such positive views of EU integration as the vanguard and protector of internationalism, social progress and (suitably reformed) social democracy have many British intellectuals found their *leitmotif*, the guide to their approach to the Brexit debate and a platform for their analysis, and ideological rebuttal, of counter-hegemonic challenges to EU domination (Cafruny and Ryner, 2007: Chapter 1; Callinicos, 2015; Klinke, 2015). Among contemporary left-wing politicians the expression of this perspective provides a stark contrast with their colleagues of 1975. On 28th May 2017 three left-wing Remain supporters, Green MP Caroline Lucas, Labour shadow chancellor John McDonnell, and ex-Greek finance minister

Yanis Varoufakis launched 'The London Declaration: Vote In to Change Europe' asking: 'If we leave the EU, who stands to benefit most? The political and financial elites of this country.' (Another Europe is Possible, 2016). The fact that all the major investment banks and transnational corporations, the International Monetary Fund (IMF), The World Bank, the OECD, the CBI, the Bank of England, Lloyds, and the European Round Table of Industrialists, to name but a few, unanimously supported Remain does not appear to have given them, or many others on the Left, pause for thought. On the day before the 2016 referendum, of the Labour MPs who had declared their position 218 supported Remain and ten Leave (BBC, 2016a).

There nonetheless remains a question as to whether the adaptative approach of the EU hegemony has been entirely successful. It may be, as van Apeldoorn argues, that what he terms the 'embedded neoliberalism' produced by the particular nature of the EU hegemony is to a degree precarious not because it has failed in its recruitment of progressive elites but because it has neglected to gain the consent of Member States' electorates (van Apeldoorn, 2009). As an elite project, the hegemony is well equipped to deal with other elites, be they supportive or oppositional, but as the rejection of the EU in referendums in Denmark (1992, Maastricht Treaty), Ireland (2001, Treaty of Nice; 2008, Treaty of Lisbon), France (2005, European Constitution), and the Netherlands (2005, European Constitution) has demonstrated, the EU's understanding of the cultural dynamics of popular consent is much less sophisticated. Elite manoeuvring enabled these decisions to be reversed, but the underlying vulnerability of EU legitimacy, the limited nature of popular consent and the significance of its 'democratic deficit' had been clearly signalled (Cafruny and Ryner, 2003).

Culture and counter-hegemony

The promotion by some British university intellectuals of a positive view of the EU project in support of the dominant economic order, the EU, can be seen in Gramscian terms as the attempted maintenance of a cultural hegemony characterised by 'Consent given by the great masses of the population to the general direction imposed on social life by the dominant fundamental group; this consent is "historically" caused by the prestige (and consequent confidence) which the dominant group enjoys because of its position and function in the world of production' (Gramsci, 1971: 145). In its most developed form, hegemony creates 'an order in which a certain way of life and thought is dominant, in which one concept of reality is diffused throughout society in all its institutional and private manifestations, informing with its spirit all taste, morality, customs, religious and political principles, and all social relations, particularly in their intellectual and moral connotation' (Williams, 1960: 587). In other words, 'hegemony is soft power, the ability to make others want the same thing as yourself, as distinct from hard power, the ability to force others to give you what you want' (Wade, 2002: 216).

The problem exposed by the unusual political mechanism of the EU referendum was the fragility of the cultural hegemony of the EU, the limits of consent to that hegemony in large sections of the UK population, and the clear presence of counter-hegemonic values. It was those cultural values, excluded and ignored in British politics for much of the previous two

decades, which determined the outcome of the referendum and found a mode of political expression not normally accessible through the party system. Analyses of the data of the Lord Ashcroft poll, the British Election Study (BES) Internet Panel, the British Social Attitudes (BSA) survey, and the NatCen Panel Pre- and Post-Referendum surveys point to a common conclusion, albeit with different emphases: ‘only those items associated with national identity and cultural outlook proved to be significantly associated with voter choice’ (Curtice, 2017: 2).

The findings reveal a cultural divide based on the distinctive clustering of values for Leave and Remain voters, reflecting longstanding attitudes and concerns, often associated with particular socio-economic groupings and with different economic concerns. Using Latent Class Analysis to identify subgroups whose members share similar characteristics, Swales synthesises data from the BES, BSA and NatCen Panel surveys to explore the cultural characteristics of Leave and Remain voters (Swales, 2016). Three groups of Leave voters are identified: *Economically deprived, anti-immigration* (95 per cent Leave, 12 per cent of population), *Affluent Eurosceptics* (75 per cent Leave, 23 per cent of population), and *Older working classes* (73 per cent Leave, 16 per cent of population). All three groups were concerned about national identity, Britain’s independence and immigration. This echoes Ashcroft’s findings that nearly half (49 per cent) of Leave voters said the biggest single reason for wanting to leave the EU was ‘the principle that decisions about the UK should be taken in the UK’ and one third (33 per cent) said the main reason was that leaving ‘offered the best chance for the UK to regain control over immigration and its own borders’ (Ashcroft, 2016). For Remain, the groups are: *Middle class liberals* (92 per cent Remain, 25 per cent of population), *Younger, working class Labour voters* (61 per cent Remain, 25 per cent of population). Economic issues, particularly the economic risks of leaving the EU, were found to resonate much more strongly with Remain voters. Again, the Ashcroft survey confirms this with the findings that the single most important reason for the Remain decision was that ‘the risks of voting to leave the EU looked too great when it came to things like the economy, jobs and prices’ (43 per cent) with just over three in ten (31 per cent) reasoning that remaining would mean the UK having ‘the best of both worlds’, having access to the EU single market without Schengen or the euro (Ashcroft, 2016).

The geographic distribution of the referendum vote, and therefore the balance between challenge and hegemony, varies by constituent country of the UK. Most committed to Brexit is England, with 53.4% voting Leave, closely followed by Wales (52.5%). At the other end of the scale is Scotland, with 38% voting Leave, leaving Northern Ireland roughly in between at 44.2% Leave. This distribution accurately reflects long term trends in differences in attitudes to the EU between the four countries (Curtice, 2016a; Curtice and Evans, 2015; Henderson *et al*, 2016). Given the overwhelming preponderance of English voters as a proportion of the UK electorate (84%), it is significant that the importance of English identity as a factor in the Leave vote emerges in all of the studies of the referendum vote, here reflecting the established understanding of the increasing significance of English ethnic majority nationalism in the UK’s electoral politics (Kenny, 2014; Wellings, 2012; Wyn Jones *et al*, 2012). Drawing on BSA data, Mann and Fenton observe it is noteworthy that the association between feeling ‘very strongly English’ and voting Leave holds for all age groups and social classes. Thus although young people overall voted by a large margin to remain in

the EU, 57.9 per cent of 18-25 and 67.4 per cent of 26-35 year olds with a very strong sense of English identity voted Leave (Mann and Fenton, 2017). Similarly, in comparing the effect of English and British identities, Curtice notes that among those who said they were English and denied that they were British, nearly three-quarters (74 per cent) voted to leave, whereas less than two in five (38 per cent) of those who rejected feeling English did so (Curtice, 2017: 11; see also Ashcroft 2016 for similar findings). He suggests that 'within England at least, Britishness rather than Englishness has long been promoted as a "multi-cultural" identity, and thus there has also long been a link between feeling British and holding a more liberal attitude towards migrant minorities' (Curtice, 2017:11). An internet-based survey conducted just before the EU referendum found that of those who defined their national identity as English 72 per cent intended to vote Leave whereas only 43 per cent who defined it as British intended to do so (Whiteley and Clarke, 2016). In aggregate, what this data suggests is a hegemonic challenge to the EU, rooted in an increasing sense of English identity, opposed principally by a Scottish commitment to its own, pro-EU, national values, that will be a continuing feature of the political tensions within the Union generated by Brexit.

It is likely that the preoccupation of Leave voters with national and cultural identity is underpinned by a broad constellation of values quite distinct from those held by Remain voters. Ashcroft's survey shows that 'By large majorities, voters who saw multiculturalism, feminism, the Green movement, globalisation and immigration as forces for good voted to remain in the EU; those who saw them as a force for ill voted by even larger majorities to leave' (Ashcroft, 2016). Pursuing a similar path, the BSA regularly compares two cultural groupings: libertarian ('people should largely be free to choose their own moral and cultural compass and thus feel relatively happy about living in a diverse society') and authoritarian ('everybody in society should acknowledge and accept a common set of social mores and cultural practices, as this helps to maintain a more cohesive society'). When applied to the EU referendum vote as three categories (libertarian, authoritarian and in-between), the results showed that 72 per cent of the most 'authoritarian' group voted to leave, while just 21 per cent of the most 'libertarian' group did so. The report concludes that how people voted in the referendum reveals 'a major cultural divide between those who prefer a relatively homogenous society and those who are content with a more diverse one' (Curtice, 2017: 10). In their comparison of the voters in the constituencies of Clacton (Leave) and Cambridge (Remain), Jennings and Stoker identify similar groupings of contrasting cultural values which they label 'backwater' ('inward-looking, relatively negative about the EU and immigration, worried by the emergence of new rights for 'minorities' and prone to embracing nostalgia') and 'cosmopolitan' ('global in outlook; relatively positive about the EU; pro-immigration; comfortable with more rights and respect for women, ethnic communities and gays and lesbians; and generally future-oriented') (Jennings and Stoker, 2016: 372). Other political arguments undoubtedly contribute to the identity of these groupings, such as the opportunity to re-establish relationships with members of the Commonwealth for Leavers and the need to prevent military conflict in Europe for Remainers, but the analysis shows they have less statistical significance than the cultural variables.

The social basis of the cultural divide may well be contained in Merton's distinction between the two opposing cultures of localism and cosmopolitanism where the members of the former are geographically permanent, embedded in local occupations, education, voluntary organisation membership, and social networks and the latter geographically transient with little social or cultural stake in the local system but characterised by wider networks of expertise or influence (Merton, 1957). If, as Gordon suggests, this approach has some explanatory weight (Gordon, 2017), we could then anticipate that particular socio-economic variables would be associated with local and cosmopolitan cultures, consistent with the distinctive values of each. Thus the white working class, less well educated, and socially conservative middle class would tend to value the local and the younger, graduate educated, professional classes the cosmopolitan. Although this is to an extent conjecture, it does fit the reported profiles of Leave and Remain voters. Cultural affinity thus brings together somewhat unlikely socio-economic bedfellows, particularly in the case of Leave voters, emphasising that it is cultural rather than economic identity that is the driving force in this political realignment, temporary or otherwise (Curtice, 2016b; Kaufman, 2016).

In shorthand, this counterpoint of cultural values represents the collision between the hegemony of the EU and the emerging counter-hegemonic challenge in the UK. As Swales observes, the Leave vote was 'underpinned by a broad-based coalition of voters which is much more wide-ranging than the "left behind"' (Swales, 2016: 2). Because it is primarily a cultural coalition, its identity cuts across the conventional class and party divisions in British politics (Henderson *et al*, 2016: 198). Hence, for example, whilst 58 per cent of Conservative voters supported Leave, so also did 37 per cent of Labour voters (Ashcroft, 2016). As a result, it is cultural variables which have the strongest statistical strength in the analyses presented by the different surveys.

The issue of immigration then provides the lightning rod which channels and illuminates the political tensions inherent in this collision, acting as the means to fuse the cultural and economic effects of the Leave alliance. It is the surface indicator of a deep-seated cultural conflict with strongly associated economic concerns. According to the British Election Study, the vast majority who said immigration (88 per cent) or sovereignty (90 per cent) was the most important issue voted Leave (Swales, 2016: 13) – two issues obviously linked because 'taking back control' was regarded as necessary to deal with immigration. The report from the most comprehensive study of the vote for Brexit, the Essex Continuous Monitoring Surveys (ECMS), shows how public concern over immigration was central to explaining why people voted to leave the EU (Clarke *et al*, 2017). Immigration was indissolubly linked by voters to the perceived threats to national identity and culture (Goodwin and Milazzo, 2017). Other evidence reveals the linkage between cultural, economic and political variables forged by the immigration issue. Goodwin and Milazzo find that the coefficients are positive and statistically significant for the three variables of perceived effect of immigration on Britain's culture, the economy and welfare 'indicating that those who believe that immigrants are a burden on the welfare state and those who feel that immigration is undermining Britain's culture and is bad for the national economy were more likely to cast their vote to leave the EU' (Goodwin and Milazzo, 2017: 458). Cultural challenge and the threat to jobs and the NHS were perceived to be closely aligned.

None of this should come as a surprise. The history of immigration as an issue embedded in public concern about the vulnerability of national identity to the arrival of competing cultures has been documented for two decades, both in the UK and elsewhere. Research has shown the transition of English identity from an obscure backwater to the political mainstream as a sense of ethnic majority nationalism has grown in response to the increasingly multicultural character of British society produced by immigration (Aughey, 2007; Kenny, 2014; Kumar, 2003; Wellings, 2012). Effectively, cultural pluralism has generated an unresolved competition over the definition and nature of British citizenship, a competition amplified by the parallel claims of EU citizenship (Ashcroft and Bevir, 2017; Lodge *et al*, 2012). Other EU countries have experienced similar tensions. In his study of support for populist extremist parties in Europe, Goodwin observes that ‘the decisive motive is the feeling that immigration and rising diversity threaten their national culture, the unity of their national community and way of life’ (Goodwin, 2011: x). Across the EU, Euroscepticism has been found to be strongly driven by the identity-related concerns stimulated by immigration (Boomgaarden *et al*, 2011; Lubbers and Scheepers, 2007).

It is entirely consistent with this literature that since the early 2000s immigration has been judged by the UK public as one of the top three ‘most important issues facing Britain today’ (Ipsos Mori, 2017a: slide 4), its rise coinciding with the sharp increase in net migration to the UK from the late 1990s onwards (Migration Observatory, 2017). By June 2016 immigration had become the dominant concern for the public with 48 per cent of the population viewing it as ‘the most important issue’ with the NHS second on 37 per cent (Ipsos Mori, 2017b). Throughout this period, British voters had expressed their growing concern about the economic and cultural effects of immigration, particularly in the absence of any explicit policy on the relationship between multiculturalism and integration (Heath and Tilley, 2005; McClaren and Johnson, 2007). Whereas in 1995 63 per cent of people wanted immigration reduced ‘a little’ or ‘a lot’, with 39 per cent wanting the larger of the two reductions, by 2013 these proportions stood at 77 per cent and 56 per cent respectively (Ford and Lymperopoulou, 2017: 6). Underlying these data is a widening social and cultural divide over immigration characterised by a strong association with age, education, social class and migrant heritage (Heath and Richards, 2017). For the social groups untroubled by immigration the issue remains low profile whilst for ‘immigration-sceptics’ it has become ever more central to their electoral decisions and a source of potential political mobilisation (Ford and Lymperopoulou, 2017: 14; see also Ford and Goodwin, 2017).

Given the nature of the cultural divide, the EU became the focus of oppositional challenge for two reasons. First, its promotion of the hegemonic principle of the free movement of labour as a means of economic integration inevitably meant the parallel promotion of cultural movement. Migrant labour carries its own language, culture and values which may, or may not, engage readily with those of the host society and to which that society may react negatively (McClaren, 2002). Second, the EU’s advocacy of ever closer political union as a vehicle for economic integration inevitably antagonised European citizens who valued their distinctive national cultures (Carey, 2002; Sides and Citrin, 2007). The strongest predictor of negative attitudes towards the EU is where citizens feel their national identity is threatened by EU integration (Luedtke, 2005; McClaren, 2006). In combination, these two features of EU hegemony interacted with the cultural divide to produce a counter-

hegemonic dynamic channelled, in the first instance, through the rise of the UK Independence Party (UKIP). Public hostility towards immigration and anxiety over its perceived effects on jobs and welfare fuelled support for a party which promised to address these issues through withdrawal from the EU (Dennison and Goodwin; Ford and Goodwin, 2014). UKIP established the initial political infrastructure for the expression of the counter-hegemonic dynamic on which the Leave campaign could build. Thus in the 2014 European Parliament Election, UKIP average 39 per cent of the vote across the fifty areas that went on to give the strongest support to Leave at the referendum but averaged only 13 per cent in areas that gave the strongest support to Remain (Goodwin, 2016).

The electoral expression of this counter-hegemonic impulse through the mainstream party system has proved less than straightforward. Not only do the cultural groupings of the counter-hegemony cut across the support base of Conservative and Labour parties (the Liberal Democrats are culturally homogenous but, so far, ineffectual in this domain) but also it conflicts with the views of the majority of MPs of both main parties who support the EU and its values (Jennings and Stoker, 2016: 381). Thus just prior to the referendum, of the 635 MPs who had declared their position, 75 per cent intended to vote Remain – 57 per cent of Conservative MPs and 96 per cent of Labour MPs (BBC, 2016a). Following the 2017 general election, 56 per cent of Conservative MPs supported Remain (Manse and Lindsay, 2017). It is in this context that the referendum assumes a unique political significance because it facilitated the clear and unprecedented expression of longstanding counter-hegemonic values. In so doing, it posed a challenge not only to the UK's party elites but also to the overwhelming majority of British traditional intellectuals who supported Remain and the EU hegemony (Henderson et al, 2016: 198).

Interpreting the challenge: the propagation of normality

How have university intellectuals in the social sciences then interpreted the challenge and what does this tell us about their relationship with the EU hegemony? Although the current evidence suggests that the majority are sufficiently persuaded by the socially progressive profile of the EU to absorb its neo-liberal agenda, the considerable literature on intellectuals warns against viewing this as a permanent condition. Michels, for example, observes that 'intellectuals are the officers and subaltern of all arms and of all armies' so that 'In the politics of any period the parties of revolution, of continuity and of reaction have all been in their hands' (Michels, 1937: 119). Mannheim echoes this view and notes that they may be found 'in all camps', serving as theorists for 'conservatives', for the 'proletariat'....and for the 'liberal bourgeoisie' (Mannheim, 1949: 141). Case studies of the ideological role of university intellectuals confirm a comprehensive range of hegemonic and counter-hegemonic allegiances. On the hegemonic side can be quoted the construction by US university intellectuals of the systems of ideas, values and procedures which constituted the US state's ideology of nuclear rationality (Gray, 1993; Kaplan, 1983; Klein, 1988); and the formulation of the paradigm of political development where US foreign policy goals were fused with the fate of developing countries, of which Vietnam was the most notable example (Gendzier, 1985). On the counter-hegemonic side, the rise of the New Left in the US (Gitlin, 1987; Miller, 1987) and Britain (Kenny, 1995; Hall, 2010) engaged university academics in modes of cultural opposition to the state which extended considerably beyond a focus on single events such as the Vietnam War.

Despite the historical diversity, it is the latter which appears to have had the more enduring effect on the political character of British academics, with a consistent movement to the left when measured in terms of party membership. (A similar trend is observable among US academics – Gross, 2012: Gross and Fosse, 2013.) Between the General Elections of 1964 and 2017, support for the Conservatives declined from 35 per cent in 1964 to 7 per cent in 2017. For the same period, the left and centre-left parties (Labour, Social Democrats/Liberal Democrats and Greens) increased their share from 64 per cent in 1964 to 83 per cent in 2015 (88 per cent if the Scottish National Party is included - Halsey, 1992: Chapter 11, Appendix I; Times Higher Education, 2017). In parallel to this transition, up to 2016, the UK state became increasingly supportive of the EU, as illustrated by the contribution of state institutions to the Remain position in the referendum debate. As a result, the largely left of centre academy, convinced of the EU as an agent for social progress, has found itself working in harmony with the underlying preferences of the state to maintain the EU hegemony. In this capacity and no longer counter-hegemonic, British university intellectuals are in the position of explaining and, if they are to defend the hegemony, de-legitimising the counter-hegemonic cultural challenge to the state. This task was likely to be more difficult than they perhaps realised. It is revealing that supporters of Leave and Remain have quite different views of the authority of academics, and other cultural authorities, suggesting that the legitimising capacity of academics is to an extent dependent on the views of the audience they address. Thus in a poll conducted just prior to the referendum, YouGov found that while 68% of voters intending to vote Remain trusted academics, only 26% of those intending to vote Leave did so (for economists the figures were 63% and 21%) (YouGov, 2016). What form have the explanations taken?

In order to acquire and maintain the consent of their subject population through ideological domination, hegemonies ‘must propose a set of descriptions of the world, and the values that preside over it, that become in large measure internalised by those under its sway’ (Anderson, 2017: 21). From this exercise, if successful, emerges a concept of normality supported by an infrastructure of institutions characterised by stability and continuity. For the EU’s neo-liberal hegemony, an important strategic objective has been the alignment of the economic values of freedom of movement of capital, goods, services and labour with the expanding cultural values of multiculturalism and cosmopolitanism and their associated concerns of environmental protection, human rights, and gender equality (Inglehart, 2008; Inglehart and Welzel, 2005). Both economic and cultural values of the hegemony draw their strength from the same principles of ‘freedom’ and ‘internationalism’, suggesting a commonality of purpose and direction. Consolidated and protected through the institutions of the EU, this hegemonic blend then works to define and capture the moral high ground of ‘social progress’ and establish the ‘inevitability’ and ‘rationality’ of the EU’s historic mission and, by definition, the unprogressive and irrational nature of those who oppose it. Its effect is graphically revealed in the contrasting constellation of social attitudes held by Leave and Remain voters, discussed above with data from the Ashcroft and BSA surveys (p. ?).

Given the hegemonic disruption achieved by the EU referendum result, traditional intellectuals are likely to reassert the normality of the EU project by drawing on perspectives which show how ‘abnormal’ the Leave vote was. Interestingly, the infrastructure for so

doing is already present, a product of the hegemonic definition of what constitutes normal democratic views, normal democratic activity and normal democratic citizens. Although, as has been documented, public concern regarding the impact of large scale migration on national cultures and identities is longstanding and widespread in the EU, its significance has been weighed and judged in the context of its principal mode of expression: populism. Parties taking up the immigration issue such as France's Front National, the Austrian Freedom Party, Italy's Lega Nord, Belgium's Vlaams Blok, the Swiss Autopartei and Tessin League, the German Republikaner and the Alternative for Germany party, the Danish and Norwegian Progress Parties, the Dutch Party for Freedom and Sweden's New Democracy have all been described as populist to the extent that, as one seasoned observer puts it, their activities constitute 'an appeal to "the people" against both the established structure of power and the dominant ideas and values of the society' (Canovan, 1999: 3). Populist parties are 'of the people but not of the system' (Taggart, 1996: 32), happy to employ devices such as referendums to access popular concerns. As Canovan notes, 'On the face of it, appealing to the grassroots in this way looks like a democratic thing to do; after all, the referendums and popular initiatives favoured by populists are universally referred to within the literature of political science as "direct democracy"' (Canovan, 1999: 7).

It is significant, therefore, that many social scientists see populism not as a sign of democratic health but instead as a form of deviancy from normal democratic behaviour, a 'pathology' in the body politic requiring medical, if not surgical, intervention (Betz, 1994: 4); a symptom of 'backwardness' that needs to be corrected (Di Tella, 1997); a sign of illiberalism and intolerance (Berezin, 2009; BBC, 2016b). Hence, pursuing the medical metaphor, Macron's victory in the French presidential election has been interpreted as 'a welcome remedy to the populist fever that hit the United Kingdom with Brexit' and an important step to 'win the war against populism' (Laine, 2017). Where possible, this abnormal pathology of democratic behaviour is associated with an abnormal pathology of political attitude: populism is presented as closely linked with 'extreme' or 'radical' Right views and 'extreme' or 'radical' Right parties, both symptomatic of resistance to the hegemonic conception of social and political progress (Betz, 1994; Norris, 2005). At its most unproblematic, the hegemonic narrative of populism asserts that 'Populism favours monoculturalism over multiculturalism, national self-interest over international cooperation and development aid, closed borders over the free flow of peoples, ideas, labour and capital, and traditionalism over progressive and liberal social values' (Inglehart and Norris, 2016: 7). This view conflicts with other findings on populism. In *21st century* populism, Albertazzi and McDonnell (2009:4) for example approvingly quote Taguieff's view that populism is compatible 'not only with any political ideology (Left or Right, reactionary or progressive, reformist or revolutionary) and any economic programme (from state-planned to neoliberal), but also with diverse social bases and diverse types of regime' (Taguieff, 2002: 84). But it is in the nature of hegemony that it must be selective in the story it tells.

Deviancy theory advises us that deviant sub-cultures can expect to be labelled, stigmatised and shamed when they do not accept the norms of a dominant social group (Becker, 1963; Matza, 1969). This is an important dimension of the way in which the hegemonic process promotes normality. From the EU hegemony perspective, those who engage in populist political behaviour are not only defying the norms and values of the dominant democratic

culture and mainstream parties but also revealing their several inadequacies as citizens. To the extent that they deny the economic and political logic of the hegemony they are, presumably, acting irrationally and, when seduced by a charismatic actor such as UKIP's Nigel Farage, emotionally. In this way it becomes possible for the hegemonic narrative to 'explain' the Leave vote in terms which both affirm the rational character of the mainstream democratic process and the deviant character of those citizens who respond to populist appeals. There then just remains the labelling and stigmatising of these deviants as xenophobic, racist and nationalist to complete their entry into the status of 'otherness' normally accorded to immigrants (Triandafyllidou, 2001: Chapter 2). With this somewhat diminished social identity and, one assumes capacity for judgement, they become 'susceptible to the anti-establishment, nativist, and xenophobic scare-mongering exploited of populist movements, parties, and leaders, blaming "Them" [immigrants] for stripping prosperity, job opportunities, and public services from "Us"' (Inglehart and Norris, 2016: 2). Hegemonic marginality and political vulnerability thus go hand in hand.

As an exercise in social devaluation this interpretation has much merit and power. It leads, directly or indirectly, to the use of some categories in the language of social science analysis which reflect the assumptions on which the hegemony is built. Linguistic constructs can be employed as an instrument of hegemonic propagation, permeating the apparently objective discourse of social science with implied evaluations of social worth. Thus the hegemony would expect that those who opposed the economic and social progress of the UK under the steady guiding hand of the EU and voted Leave would have socio-economic characteristics that could sensibly categorise them as a group 'left behind' in the process of globalisation (Ford, 2016; Freeland, 2016; Goodwin and Heath, 2016), members of a 'backwater' (juxtaposed against a 'cosmopolitan' category - Jennings and Stoker, 2016), and 'authoritarian' (adherence to a common set of cultural practices rather than supportive of diversity – Curtice, 2017) in their social attitudes. Here we have a set of social labels, derived from and synergistic with the hegemonic value system, that reinforce and legitimise its operating precepts and diminish the significance of its opponents. It is difficult to know whether the citizens who occupy these categories are to be pitied or condemned. Certainly the effect of the category descriptors is to diminish if not negate the authenticity of their value position. As McKenzie observes: 'the "left behind" rhetoric actively supports this devalued identity of the deindustrialized working class' and 'relies on the stereotypes and prejudices that the poor white working class are "old fashioned", un-modern, have no mobility and long for the past' (McKenzie, 2017: 208). Such negative labelling may produce a strong response from the deviant Leave voter, as this exchange between two of McKenzie's interviewees illustrates:

Sally said, in relation to the *Guardian* social media commentators [who had accused Leave voters of being racists, bigots and left behind]: 'We don't exist to them do we?' Anne looked at Sally and said 'well that's a shame for them because all us fuckers who don't exist are voting out tomorrow'. (McKenzie, 2017: 205)

Devaluation may diminish the legitimacy of the counter-hegemonic impulse but not its capacity to resist and challenge. Indeed, it may act to consolidate such opposition.

In sharp contrast to the hegemonic interpretation, Goodhart's analysis in *The road to somewhere* of 'the populist revolt' that propelled Brexit provides an illustration of how a different ideological starting point from that of the hegemony can produce a different mode of categorisation of the Leave-Remain divide with different evaluative implications. His principal division is between the metropolitan, highly educated elites, whom he classifies as 'Anywheres', and poorer, less educated, older 'Somewheres', who feel rooted in a traditional social and racial culture, and want to stay that way (Goodhart, 2017). In the value context advanced by Goodhart it is the 'Somewheres' of populism who are 'normal' and the 'Anywheres' who are seen to lack legitimacy, an interesting reversal of the hegemonic order. It is a reversal which recognises the permanence and prevalence of the populist appeal and hence the difficulty faced by the EU hegemony in maintaining its dominant interpretation of Brexit as a deviant and temporary event. Writing about Populist Extremist Parties (PEP) in Europe, Goodwin observes:

Much like other voters, citizens who support PEPs are not irrational. They are guided by clear and coherent goals: they want immigration reduced and rising diversity curtailed or halted altogether. They are deeply concerned about these issues, and profoundly dissatisfied with the current response (Goodwin, 2011: 10).

The continuity of these concerns, documented in the studies of populism over the past three decades and reflected in the long-established presence of parties such as the Front National in conventional party politics, suggest that the hegemony faces an uphill task in maintaining its ideological dominance through its current approach to the interpretation of challenges to its authority. Political demands do not evaporate simply because they are ideologically devalued. Indeed, as Katsambekis argues, the interpretation of such demands as illegitimate populism may enhance their effect: 'by denouncing any opposition to the mainstream, by dismissing any critique of the "moderate" forces as "dangerous populism", mainstream politics has been feeding anti-establishment actors which now take a firm reactionary stance and seem more powerful than ever' (Katsambekis, 2017: 208). Instead, if the hegemony and its supporting intellectuals are to adapt to the reality of the cultural divide which underpins events like the successful Leave vote, they will need to recognise that support for populist parties may be indicative 'that something must be wrong with our democratic representational systems; something is not working in the representational bond and relation between the governed and the governors, common citizens and the political elites' (Katsambekis, 2017: 203).

Conclusion

Between the 1975 and 2016 EU referendums the UK Left moved from a position of opposition to the EU as a vehicle for the advancement of international capitalism to overwhelming support for it as a protector of social solidarity, social progress and internationalism. Hegemonic adaptation by the EU had successfully overlaid its twin economic and political objectives of neo-liberalism and 'ever-closer union' with a narrative of a 'social Europe' very much in line with left-wing concerns. During the same period, British university academics progressively moved to the Left, embracing the revised EU orthodoxy as they did so, culminating in their overwhelming support for Remain in the EU referendum.

As traditional intellectuals who have chosen to support a particular hegemony, the majority of British academics, particularly in the social sciences, are in a position where they may act to legitimise that hegemony and gain the consent of the governed through the construction, propagation and adaptation of an interpretation of the world, a view of normality, synergistic with the interests of the historic bloc: in this case the EU and its supporting organisations (IMF, World Bank, OECD etc). Where they choose to pursue this path, they face an increasingly complex task as a result of the widespread cultural opposition across the EU to the hegemony's neo-liberal agenda and its impact on national, regional and local identities. In the case of the UK and its EU referendum, all the evidence from a variety of data sources suggests that the Leave vote was propelled by a long-standing cultural divide in British society created by the impact of unprecedented levels of migration. As a survey of voters just prior to the referendum concluded, 'The immigration issue is primarily about threats to identity and culture resulting from people coming into the country without any apparent controls. Most people saw Brexit as a way of tackling that – which trumped economic concerns.' (Whiteley and Clarke, 2016; see also Kaufman, 2016) Economic concerns on both sides of the Leave-Remain divide there undoubtedly were, but the evidence suggests they were dominated by the strength of their respective cultural imperatives. Acting outwith the constraints of mainstream party politics, the referendum facilitated the political emergence of this cultural challenge and, in so doing, exposed the fragility of the value assumptions underpinning the EU hegemony, and hence the limits of its legitimacy.

Whilst social scientists have revealed the extent and nature of the cultural tensions in considerable detail, there has been little explication of the long-term political significance of these tensions for the UK state, its relationship with the EU hegemony and with its own citizens. The plurality of UK citizenship revealed by the referendum has been described but its implications ignored. Instead, there has been a re-assertion of the existing explanations of challenge to the EU and its progressive vision. Cultural opposition to the EU continues to be explained in terms of its backwardness, irrationality and vulnerability to the siren voices of right-wing populism. In general, citizens who are members of this opposition are given little conceptual authenticity as contributors to the democratic process but instead viewed as abnormal political malcontents seeking to impede the march of social progress. There appears to be only limited awareness that the consequent labelling of such opposition as deviant from the hegemonic normality may constitute an obstacle to its proper analysis and, if one is supportive of the hegemony, to the identification of appropriate measures to regain the consent of the disaffected citizen. In addition, as an exercise in devaluation such an approach may well be counter-productive since it may act to stimulate resentment, enhance existing cultural divisions and reduce the chances of identifying the political means for the inclusion of otherwise marginal citizens in the democratic process. Put simply, not only did academics fail to understand successfully oppose the challenge because of their normative commitment to the EU, they may also have inadvertently fuelled the power of its cultural dynamic.

In part, the reluctance to explore the longer-term implications of the cultural division may stem from a desire to protect and reassert the values of the hegemony when faced by the

counter-hegemonic threat apparently posed by the Leave vote. Reflecting on that vote Professor Sir Keith Burnett wrote:

But I have also worried that our oasis of intellectual and societal tolerance is threatened by the storm that swirls around us. Could we even suffer a 'Stockholm syndrome' and start sharing the emotions that live and breathe around us? (Burnett, 2016)

Since understanding the emotions that drive the cultural opposition to the EU hegemony would be an important first step in analysing its significance, fear of engagement will obviously inhibit conceptual development. Public and academic discussion since the referendum suggests that social science intellectuals have yet to confront fully the implications of this opposition for a party system dominated by a commitment to Remain, a political debate which focuses on the economic to the exclusion of the cultural dimensions of Brexit, and a powerful but largely hidden question of citizenship and identity. Hegemonic adaptation by Britain's university intellectuals is required if they are to incorporate the cultural divide into their interpretation of Brexit in a manner which attaches due weight to its political significance.

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